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SUBJECT: POLICE BUST MALAYSIA-LINKED TIP GANGS IN HCMC AND MEKONG DELTA

REF: 06 HCMC 437

¶1. (SBU) On January 17, we called the senior HCMC Ministry of Public Security official in charge of trafficking in persons to discuss HCMC press reports that police broke up two criminal rings trafficking Vietnamese women to Malaysia for prostitution. According to the official, on January 10, police in Hau Giang Province in the Mekong Delta arrested four individuals for trafficking at least thirty Vietnamese women. Two of the suspects were from the Mekong Delta city of Can Tho, one from the Central Highlands province of Lam Dong Province, and one from Hau Giang. The alleged ring leader, Nguyen Thi Tuyet Nga, was not among those arrested. According to our contact, Nga resides in Malaysia and periodically travels to Vietnam to recruit young Vietnamese girls from the Mekong Delta region. Vietnam Interpol has issued an international arrest warrant for Nga and the GVN is working to secure the repatriation of victims in Malaysia.

¶2. (SBU) According to the MPS official, the police were able to act after five trafficking victims who escaped in Malaysia returned to Vietnam and filed reports with local authorities. These women reported that at least another twenty five women were trafficked to Malaysia.

¶3. (SBU) The second set of arrests occurred in HCMC on January 16 and led to the arrest of a ringleader Quan Chi Phat and his accomplice Hua Hue Muoi, both ethnic Chinese Vietnamese residents of HCMC. Phat was the ringleader, whose cousin (nationality unknown) in Malaysia coordinated operations on that end. The traffickers enticed their targets with offers of overseas jobs that claimed to pay as much as USD 1,000 per month. The women traveled to Malaysia as tourists. During the search of the traffickers' homes, police reportedly found numerous documents belonging to the victims, including their Vietnamese identification cards. According to our police contact, the ringleaders confessed to trafficking thirty women in 2003, but the investigation is ongoing to examine if other, more recent, trafficking crimes were committed.

¶4. (SBU) According to the MPS official, most of the victims of this ring were forced into sex work upon their arrival in Malaysia. Malaysian brothels reportedly paid the ring USD 8,000 for each woman. However, MPS officials noted that their initial inquiries suggested that at least some of the women found regular jobs on the local economy or married Malaysians of their own volition.

¶5. (SBU) The MPS official said that police were able to act after some victims stepped forward. Ten of the victims apparently refused to "accept their fates." They were able to contact relatives in Vietnam who, in turn, sought out

ringleader Quan Chi Phat. He allegedly charged the relatives USD 1,000 each to secure the women's return.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: We are seeking meetings with MPS officials in HCMC, Can Tho and Hau Giang to follow up on these cases. From what we have gleaned thus far, they appear similar to a March 2006 series of arrests (reftel), in which HCMC police rescued up to 39 women who were about to be trafficked internationally, principally to Malaysia. The new arrests confirm that law enforcement authorities in southern Vietnam are focusing more intently on combating trafficking. In previous discussions, however, police have complained that a lack of training and resources has limited their ability to investigate trafficking cases as effectively as they would like. These two cases, which only could be cracked after some of the victims stepped forward, seem to support the police's contention that they could do more with additional support. End Comment.

WINNICK